

## THE AUSTRALIAN FLAG

(Source: Department of Administrative Services)

### Introduction

The flag of Australia is the only flag to fly unchallenged throughout a whole continent. Until September 1945 it was the only flag proclaiming the administration of all the lands in a sector from the Equator to the Pole, embracing the Territories of Papua New Guinea and the vast Australian Antarctic Territory, as well as numerous islands in three oceans. Since 1975 the independent nation of Papua New Guinea has unfurled its own flag.

### War and peace

The flag heralded Australia's entry into nationhood in 1901. It flew over the site for the national capital at Canberra in 1908, on the first ships of the new navy in 1910 and at the first Australian base on the Antarctic continent in 1911. Since 1953 it has been flown at Australian Antarctic bases.

In many ways, the flag was needed long before it was produced. At the first modern Olympic Games at Athens in 1896, for example, Australia won two gold medals, but no Australian flag was available for the victory ceremony. Four years later in Paris, an Australian victory was recognised by raising the Union Jack. The Australian National Flag did not appear until the 1908 Games. From that date it has been raised for medal winners at every Olympic Games. In 1956 it also flew with pride of place as the flag of the host nation at Melbourne.

The flag was carried to New Guinea at the outbreak of World War I by the naval and military force which captured the German colonies, by the cruiser Sydney in the first naval battle of the war, by the Anzacs who landed at Gallipoli and by the 'diggers' who spearheaded the victories in France in 1917-18.

It was seen around the world again in World War II. When Singapore was retaken in 1945, the first flag to fly was an Australian flag made secretly in a prison camp, and it was worn by H.M.A.S. Hobart in Tokyo Bay when the Japanese surrender was signed on 2 September 1945.

### Early flags in Australia

Before the twentieth century there was no Australian nation, and no Australian flag. The ships of other countries carried their flags along Australian coasts for 182 years before the first European settlement in 1788. The first known occasion was in 1606, when the Dutch vessel Duyfken entered the Gulf of Carpentaria and charted 200 miles of shoreline. Only 16 years later, the British flag appeared on the East Indiaman Tyral, which was wrecked off Western Australia.

Many Dutch and British navigators followed, so that the coast had seen many flags before Captain Cook made his first Australian landfall in 1770. Cook carried the British flag of the time along the whole length of the fertile east coast. At Botany Bay, adjacent to Sydney Harbour, he raised it on land each day, and at the northern most point of the continent he planted it on Possession Island and formally claimed all his discoveries in the name of the British Crown.

Eighteen years later, at Sydney Cove, Captain Arthur Phillip raised the flag again to make the beginning of permanent settlement. The Union Jack which Captain Cook and Captain Phillip planted in 1770 and 1788 was the old Union Flag of England and Scotland, bearing the red cross of St George on a white field, combined with the white diagonal cross of St Andrew on a blue field. This had been the flag of the United Kingdom since 1707, but when Ireland was added to the union in 1801, the red diagonal cross of St Patrick on a white field was included to form the present British flag.

The new 'Union Jack' flew in Australia for the whole of the nineteenth century. It was carried by the explorers who unlocked the continent, the mariners who circumnavigated it, and the founding fathers who established five more colonies on its coast. It also flew in Papua in 1884 when that country was annexed as an Australian dependency.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, a growing Australian nationalism brought forth many unofficial flags—all of them incorporating the constellation of the Southern Cross (Crux Australis), which was universally accepted as the emblem of the Great South Land.

In 1851, the Australasian Anti-Transportation League, which opposed the sending of convicts from Britain, adopted a flag remarkably like the Australian ensign of today. It carried the Union Jack on the upper hoist and the five stars of the Southern Cross in gold on the fly.

National fervour inspired more unofficial flags for the River Murray League's paddlewheel fleet (1853), the goldminers rebellion at Eureka (1854), the racial riots at Lambing Flat goldfields (1860-61), the first Royal Visit (1867) and the Federation League (1894). All of them featured the Southern Cross and most of them had the Union Jack in the hoist.

### Need for a national flag

Until Federation, the Australian colonies used for official purposes the flags of Great Britain—the Union Flag (popularly called the Union Jack) and the three Ensigns of the United Kingdom; e.g. the Red Ensign, the Blue Ensign and the White Ensign. The necessity of a Commonwealth flag arose from the schemes of the British Government for the defence of Empire rather than from any vision of Australian nationhood.

The naval defence of the Australian colonies had from the time of the first settlement, been a function of the Royal Navy. In the 1880's however the Governments of the Australasian colonies agreed to contribute a portion of the cost of construction and annual maintenance of five naval ships to augment the British Fleet in Australian waters. These ships were under the direct control of the Admiral stationed at Sydney, and as ships of the Royal Navy, flew the Union flag and the White Ensign.

Soon after the establishment of responsible government in the Australian colonies in the 1850's, most of them assumed responsibility for their local defences. Under the Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865, the Naval Discipline Act was extended to gun-boats raised and maintained by the several colonies. In order that such ships might be distinguished from those of the Royal Navy, the Act contained provisions for colonial ensigns.

It was provided under that Act that the Governor of a Colony afloat should emblazon the badge of his colony in the centre of the Union and that the proper colours of ships in the employ of colonial departments should be the British Blue Ensign with the badge of the colony in the fly. These provisions rendered it necessary for each of the Australian colonies to adopt a badge for its government ships.

However in 1900 the Colonial Office in London invited the attention of the Governor-General Designate to the necessity of a Commonwealth flag to enable the new Australian entity to comply with the provisions of legislation governing colonial naval forces and mercantile marine.

### Competition for the National Flag and its aftermath

In 1900, prior to Federation, the Melbourne journal the *Evening Herald* held a competition with a prize of 25 pounds for the best design for a Federal Australian Flag; and eventually a prize design was selected. This design bears no resemblance to our present National Flag, and actually was a flag of stars and stripes on the pattern of the United States Flag.

Not to be outdone, another Melbourne journal *The Review of Reviews* in their issue of 20 November 1900 gave details of a competition for a design for a Federal Flag offering 50 pounds for the winning design. This Journal stated that the previous competition was purely local, but its competition would be open to the whole of Australia and overseas countries. However in April 1901 the Commonwealth Government in a Gazette dated 29 April 1901 announced details of an official competition.

The prize money for the Commonwealth Government competition was fixed at 200 pounds for the winning design. This amount included 75 pounds from the *Review of Reviews* journal, 50 pounds from a tobacco company, and the balance of 75 pounds from the Government of Australia. It was agreed that all designs previously entered in the *Evening Herald* competition would be included in the new 'National' competition which was also made world-wide and advertised in many forms in overseas countries.

The Commonwealth Government appointed seven judges, specially selected, representing the Army, Navy, Merchant Marine and Pilot Services and an expert in design, art and heraldry. The judges were:

Mr J. S. Blackham	Chief of staff of the Melbourne Herald who was Chief Executive Officer of the Competition
Captain C. J. Clare, CMG	of HMCS Protector, the South Australian cruiser, later the Naval Commandant of the Colonial Naval Force (South Australia)
Captain J. Edie, Lieutenant (later Admiral) P. N. Hall-Thompson RN	Superintendent of Navigation, N.S.W. of HMS Katoomba, a cruiser of the Royal Navy Squadron based at Sydney
Captain J. W. Evans, MHA	(later Premier, Speaker and Lieutenant-Governor of Tasmania)
Mr G. Stewart	an expert in heraldry
Captain J. A. Mitchell	formerly of the Victorian Pilot Service

A total of 32,823 designs was submitted to the judges, and the Prime Minister, the Hon. Edmund Barton announced that the prize money for the winning designs was to be equally divided between five persons whose designs were more or less similar.

Mr Ivor Evans, son of flag manufacturer Evan Evans of Melbourne, Victoria—aged 14 years

Mr William Stevens of Auckland, New Zealand—a merchant marine officer

Mr E. J. Nuttall of Melbourne, Victoria—an architect

Mr L. J. Hawkins of Sydney, New South Wales—aged 18 years

Mrs A. Dorrington of Perth, Western Australia—an artist relative of James Whistler

The first National Flag, 36 foot by 18 foot, made to the order of the Commonwealth Government flew above the Exhibition Building in Melbourne on 3 September 1901 when the competition results were announced.

The winning design was forwarded by the Governor-General to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1902. While the Southern Cross in the selected design was depicted by stars with points ranging from 9 to 5 (to denote their degree of brilliance) on a blue field, the Constellation in the approved design published in the Commonwealth Gazette of 20 February 1903 as having been approved by the King consists of four seven-pointed and one five-pointed stars. The star representative of the Federation of the six colonies, in the lower half of the hoist below the Union flag, was originally of six points. This was commonly called the *Commonwealth Star*. The Gazette published colour reproductions described as the *Ensign* and the *Merchant Flag* in blue and red respectively.

In 1908 after the Commonwealth of Australia had been granted armorial bearings, the British Government was requested to agree to an alteration in the design of the Commonwealth Star in the Flag by increasing the number of points from six to seven. It would thus be brought into line with the star in the Crest of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms. It was suggested, moreover, that the extra point would symbolize the Territory of Papua acquired on 1 September 1906, and any further territories that might be acquired later. Admiralty approval was notified in the Commonwealth Gazette on 19 December 1908.

For a few years prior to 1912 some flags were used with the number of points on the stars of the Southern Cross differing from that authorised in the 1903 Gazette.

The *British Navigation Act* 1912 (Section 406) reaffirmed the approved design of 1903, as amended in 1908, with the (Australian) Red Ensign being the proper colours for merchant ships registered in Australia and having the stars of the Southern Cross and Commonwealth Star with the same number of points as previously gazetted. (Commonwealth Gazette No. 18 of 23 March 1934 depicts the correct design and measurements of the Flag).

#### **Use of Australian flags**

For many years there was considerable misunderstanding in Australia and in other countries in regard to the use of the Australian flags, particularly the Australian Blue Ensign. This was due in the main to the lack of any statutory law governing the flying of national flags in Australia, although endeavours had been made from time to time to lay down some definite procedure for the use of Australian ensigns.

For many years the Australian Blue Ensign was regarded as an official flag for flying at Commonwealth establishments only. The Merchant Flag was often flown privately on land. However, on 15 March 1941, the Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, issued the following press statement.

"The Official view is that there should be no unnecessary restriction placed on the flying of the Blue Ensign on shore. Its use on public buildings, by schools, and by the public generally would not only be permitted but appreciated, provided it is flown in a manner appropriate to the use of a national emblem. Australian merchant vessels will, of course, continue to fly the Commonwealth Red Ensign".

Further support for the more general use of the Australian Blue Ensign was given by the Prime Minister, Mr Chifley on 24 February 1947 when he issued a statement encouraging the flying of the flag.

#### **Adoption of the Australian National Flag**

In 1950, after an interdepartmental committee recommendation, Cabinet approved that the Australian Blue Ensign be adopted as the Australian National Flag. His Majesty King George VI gave formal approval in 1951.

In 1953 the Flags Act was passed in the Commonwealth Parliament formally establishing the Australian National Flag and the Australian Red Ensign. Thus the nomenclature of Australian Flags and Ensigns was changed and the Australian Blue Ensign became the Australian National Flag and the Australian Merchant Flag became the Australian Red Ensign.

The *Flags Amendment Act* 1981 which came into operation on 26 January 1982 formally amended the description of the Australian National Flag and removed the reference to the 'British Blue Ensign' in the Schedule.

#### **Use of the Australian Red Ensign on ships and other craft**

In 1981 the Shipping Registration Act was passed. This Act, which also came into operation on 26 January 1982, together with its associated Navigation Amendment Act, replaced the old 1894 United Kingdom Act relating to registration of shipping and the 1912 Navigation Act under which the Australian Red Ensign was authorised as the official colours for Australian merchant ships. Under the *Shipping Registration Act* 1981 the Australian Red Ensign remains the proper flag to be flown by Australian registered ships. However the Australian National Flag may be flown by Government ships, fishing vessels, pleasure craft and other small craft. These vessels may fly the Australian Red Ensign if they wish, but no ship may fly both the Australian National Flag and the Australian Red Ensign at the same time.

#### **Her Majesty The Queen's Personal Flag for Australia**

On 20 September 1962 Her Majesty gave her approval for the design of a personal flag for her use in Australia. It consists of a banner of the Commonwealth Arms in the proportion thirty-one by twenty-two, with a large gold seven-pointed star over all in the centre, charged with Her Majesty's initial 'E' in gold ensigned with the Royal Crown within a chaplet of gold roses on a blue roundel. Her Majesty's personal flag for Australia is used in the same manner as the Royal Standard in the United Kingdom and denotes Her Majesty's presence.

#### **Governor-General's Flag**

In Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. 56 of 16 July 1936 it was notified that the Governor-General had adopted a personal flag for use in Australia. The flag, which is in the proportion of two to one has a royal blue background on which is the Royal Crest in gold (on a St Edward's Crown a lion statant guardant also crowned) with the words 'Commonwealth of Australia' in dark blue letters on a gold scroll below the Crest. The Governor-General's Flag is flown continuously whenever His Excellency is in residence. It is also flown on vehicles in which the Governor-General is travelling.

#### **Flags of the Armed Services and Civil Aviation**

It was not until 1967 that the Royal Australian Navy was given a specifically Australian ensign. Since 1910 Royal Australian Navy ships had flown the White Ensign of the Royal Navy. On 16 February 1967 the Governor-General Lord Casey signed a Proclamation proclaiming the Australian White Ensign as the ensign for the Royal Australian Navy. This was published in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. 18 of 1 March 1967.

The Australian Army uses the National Flag and has no individual flag or ensign of its own.

In 1948 the Royal Australian Air Force applied to His Majesty King George VI for an ensign based on the Royal Air Force ensign differenced by the addition of the Southern Cross and the Commonwealth Star in the same positions as on the Australian Blue Ensign. His Majesty's Royal Warrant for the adoption of this ensign by the RAAF was given in 1949. In 1981 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II approved an amendment to the Royal Air Force Ensign which added the stylised red Kangaroo to the centre of the Air Force roundel as depicted in aircraft of the RAAF. A proclamation by the Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen under the *Flags Act* 1953 proclaiming the new Royal Australian Air Force Ensign was signed on 29 April 1982. This was published in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette S 89 of 6 May 1982.

In 1935 the Civil Air Ensign of the Commonwealth of Australia was authorised in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. 30 of 6 June 1935. This ensign was based on the Civil Air Ensign of the United Kingdom with the Commonwealth Star and the Southern Cross superimposed in yellow. In 1948 the Civil Air Ensign was re-gazetted in accordance with Regulations 11 (2) of the Regulation under the Air Navigation Act 1920-27 but with the stars in white. The Civil Air Ensign is used by the Department of Aviation on its buildings and at airports controlled by the Commonwealth.

#### **Use and flying of the National Flag**

The Australian National Flag should be displayed only in a manner befitting the national emblem; it should not be subjected to indignity or displayed in a position inferior to any other flag or ensign. The Flag normally takes precedence over all other national flags when flown in Australia. It should always be flown aloft and free. When the Australian National Flag is raised or lowered, or when it is carried past in a parade or review, all present should face the Flag, men should remove their hats and all should remain silent. Those in uniform should salute.

It is improper to use the Australian National Flag in any of the following ways:

as a covering of a statue, monument or plaque for an unveiling ceremony (a plain cover should be used);  
 as a table or seat cover;  
 allowing it to fall onto or lie upon the ground;  
 as a masking for boxes, barriers or intervening space between floor and ground level on a dais or platform.

The National Flag and representations of it should always be shown, represented or used in a dignified manner. It should not be defaced by way of printing or illustrations or masked by other objects, but displayed in a manner which may be described as 'aloft and free' whereby all symbolic parts of the Flag can be identified.

On days of national commemoration the Australian National Flag may be flown on any additional flagstaffs on public buildings. Special days of national significance are notified as they arise. The following occasions which occur annually are to be particularly noted:

1 January—anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia  
 26 January—Australia Day (and on the Monday holiday associated with Australia Day)  
 March—second Monday—Commonwealth Day  
 25 April—Anzac Day (flags to be flown at half-mast till noon then at the peak until the close of office business for a normal working day)  
 9 May—anniversary of the inauguration of Canberra as the Seat of Government (Canberra only)  
 June—Official Birthday of the Sovereign (the date being proclaimed annually) and on the second Monday The Queen's Birthday public holiday. (In Western Australia this is observed in October)  
 24 October—United Nations Day (see below)  
 11 November—Remembrance Day (flags should be flown at the peak from 8 a.m. to 10.30 a.m., at half-mast from 10.30 a.m. till 11.03 a.m. and at the peak from 11.03 a.m. until the close of office business for a normal working day)

Flags are flown at the half-mast position as a sign of mourning. The Flag is brought to the half-mast position by first raising it to the top of the mast and then immediately lowering it slowly to the half-mast position. The Flag should be raised again to the peak before being lowered for the day. The position of the Flag when flying at half-mast will depend on the size of the Flag and the length of the flagstaff. It is essential that it be lowered at least to a position recognisably 'half-mast' so as to avoid the appearance of a flag which has accidentally fallen away from the top of the mast owing to a loose flag rope. A satisfactory position for half-masting would normally be when the top of the Flag is one-third of the distance down from the top of the mast.

Flags should be flown at half-mast when directed by the Minister for Administrative Services.

There are special rules for flying of the United Nations Flag. All members of the United Nations have agreed that on United Nations day, 24 October, the United Nations Flag should be accorded the position of honour. If one position only is available, the United Nations Flag should be flown.

A diagram showing the specifications of the Australian National Flag and the Australian Red Ensign is reproduced below.

#### **Government's free-issue scheme**

In 1979 the Government extended the free-issue of National Flags, which had for many years been available only to schools, recognised youth organisations and national sporting bodies, to include many more groups and organisations concerned with community service, welfare, sporting, ethnic and religious activities in Australia. In 1980 the free-issue was further extended to include local government bodies, groups involved in historical, agricultural and pastoral pursuits, hospitals, ambulances and Australian exchange and scholarship students. By September 1982 over 20,000 flags had been issued free of charge to the community over the preceding three years.

Specifications of the Australian National Flag and Red Ensign

FLAG OF AUSTRALIA

PLATE 2

